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A STUDY OF EFFECTS OF WEB SERIES & STREAMING CONTENT ON INDIAN YOUTH

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis of various effects of web series and streaming content on the Indian youth. The researcher has examined the perception of youth regarding the web series and online streaming content that is available on online platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube, Torrent downloads and more. This study examines the psychological effects and behavioural changes amongst the youth because of web shows. This study is conducted by using quantitative research methodology, using the questionnaire research method. The respondents (who watch online video content) of the questionnaire are undergraduate and postgraduate students, and young professionals working in Patna, which is a capital city of Bihar.

Keywords: Web Series, Online Streaming, Youth, Online Content, Impact

Introduction

In the past few years, the online entertainment industry in India has marked a major growth. This has all been possible because of the changing lifestyle of the Indian viewers, significant change in the type of content consumed and the introduction of the various online video streaming platforms on which the content is served to them. With the introduction of faster and cheaper internet services in the form of mobile connection and wide availability of broadband services, there has been a major growth in the access to online content, in terms of the number of people visiting online for content, and the time they spend on watching online videos.

A report suggested that on an average, Indian viewers spend approximately eight hours 29 minutes watching online video content, which is far more than the global trend of six hours and 45 minutes. This clearly showcases the popularity of online video content, which mainly consists of web series, episodes, short films, entertaining videos and more.

A web series in simpler words is a series of short video episodes, which are released over a certain period of time in order to tell a story to the viewers. It is designed like a television daily soap or series, except for the fact that it's watched on the web platforms. Earlier, it was much popular in western countries, but with globalization, the trend of online content streaming became popular in India as well.

The introduction of Netflix, Amazon Prime, ALT Balaji, MX Player, TVF and a number of other web and App based online video streaming platforms, together with faster internet services have become very popular in the Indian entertainment industry. Even a large number of viewership comes from YouTube – the famous video streaming platform owned by the search engine giant, Google. With growing popularity, the online content

streaming has become a lucrative opportunity for the content producers, and it further has resulted in more and more content being uploaded on the internet.

The main target audience of the web series and other online streaming content is the younger generation, which is mainly comprised of teenagers, and the youth between 18 to 30 years of age. However, the audience comprises of people of 30 to 50+ years of age as well.

These online video streaming platforms focus on the ‘binge-watch’ model. To understand this better, suppose you have decided to sit and watch just one of the episodes of a web series for a day, which’ll hardly take 30 minutes, and you find yourself tempted to watch more and more episodes, even though you know you’ll be killing several hours of the day on the same.

Streaming services introduced fans to entire TV catalogues, leading to “binge-watching” where a viewer watches successive episodes of a single TV series in one sitting. Shows are now catered specifically to binge-watchers.

Working on this model helps these platforms to attract the youth, who is looking for entertainment on their smartphone or laptop devices. As the youth finds today’s television soap boring, meaningless, and lack of originality, they tend to watch a lot of drama, comedy, action, love & romance, thrill and more, which comes to them in the form of the web series or episodes.

Review of Literature

The Culture of Binge Watching in India

It is becoming apparent that the attraction for traditional television viewing is declining amongst the Indian youth. The famous OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime and other video streaming websites provide an instant access to wide categories of video content, which attracts the Indian youth.

In the last decade, India has witnessed a technologically transformative media landscape that has promoted the entry of mass-market of niche channel, content and television technologies. The new platforms of engaging with television media, largely through smart phones and now through Internet TV/ Video-On-Demand (VOD) and OTT platforms gave rise to changing viewing pattern and platform choices. (Punathambekar & Kumar, 2012; Tryon, 2015).

Moving ahead, OTT platforms took an advantage of a strong audience base that is increasingly growing accustomed to consuming entertainment content through smartphones (Laghate, 2018). The online streaming platforms have now swooped in to take their slice of the market. As the features, contents and contexts of this online video streaming differ sufficiently from traditional TV, it remains a challenge to investigate how far traditional media theories and methodologies can inform research on the changing audience and their viewing pattern. (Livingstone, 2003, 2004, 2007).

It must be noted that the most popular amongst OTT platforms in India is Hotstar, launched in 2015 and owned by Star TV (India’s biggest private broadcaster), with a total loyal user base of 75 million people in the urban and rural areas, which is followed by Amazon Prime video with 11 million subscribers (Aadeetya, 2018). While Netflix only comes in the third with around 5 million subscribers, it nevertheless offers a more interesting focus of enquiry on account of its many differences from other players and the more particular audiences it targets – niche, English speaking, affluent, urban youth (Joglekar, 2018).

Effects of Binge Watching Web Series

Several studies have proven direct or indirect effects of binge watching web series and online streaming content on the youth. A research by Sung, et al (2005) suggested that binge behaviours are thought to be closely related to negative feelings. Several studies provided examples of research articles that provide correlation between binge watching, body dissatisfaction, academic loss, depressive symptoms and low esteem, such as Stickney we al. (1999), and Stice, Prensell and Spangler (2002).

Peterson (2006) examined the effects of binge-watching on social and academic lives of college students, where he stated, “For many participants, the rhythm of their day was built around binge-watching. The scheduled a time to binge-watch web series and awarded themselves after accomplishments. While the participants downplayed or were unaware of the effects of this new watching experience, their grades suffered, their social lives are ignored, and the schedule is determined to an extent by their binge-watching habit.”

In addition, Sung et al. (2015) found that binge-watching was related to depression and loneliness among 316 respondents between 18 and 20 years old. The studies prove that binge watching web series and online video content on the OTT platforms have brought in several changes in attitude, behaviour and social life as well.

Statement of Problem

India - world’s biggest democracy has always been known for its diversity, tradition, culture, religious sentiments, and values, across the globe. It is one such country, which celebrates people, their religion and culture. People have always taken the example of India, when it comes to how traditions and culture is being passed to the next generation.

Television & Films have always been a major source of entertainment for the people in India. And at the same time, they have also been one of the biggest sources with a capability to influence thoughts, attitudes, behaviour and belief of others. It is generally seen that the young generation, especially kids and teens tend to learn the dialogues, songs or instances from movies or daily soaps, and later it stays in their mind for a longer period. And as a result, parents and elders always preferred streaming those channels, daily soap or movies, which have positivity, and don’t contain any unfavourable content.

However, the new era of web series and online video streaming, based on an economical model to earn revenue and young audience, overlook the need of the value-added content. Also, the thirst to adopt western culture has highly influenced the content, and its type being shared on the various video streaming platforms.

Today, the video streaming platforms focus only on the ‘binge watching’ model, which generated more and more numbers of viewers, and the viewing hours. It won’t be wrong to call this model as an ‘addiction’ to spend long hours on streaming online videos.

It is very well known fact that more the number of viewers and playing hours, more is the scope of revenue. As a result, we can see hundreds of web series, episodes and videos available on these platforms, and several being uploaded every minute. Since they are available on the internet, it is easily accessible to the youth via smartphones or laptops.

The content served here is mostly unregulated with a lot of factors which boost the number of young, school and college going audience. These content contains too much of hatred, vulgarity, abusive language, sense of rebellion against parents, country, law or religion, and other taboos of the society. It deals in originality and creativity, but at the same time, it has a strong potential to attract the youth’s attention. In the end, it introduces a lot of topics, subjects and ideas, which the Indian youth might be unaware of, or can be influenced from.

A general day in a youth's life should be filled with a lot of activities like playing outdoor games, meeting with friends, exercise and other activities like exercise, doing homework and being physically active. However, all of these are today replaced with online video streaming and web shows. Being addicted to internet and online content, they have lesser time for human interaction, which also harms their physical and mental development.

It is already understood that youths are more likely to imitate and adapt one's behaviour into their own because they can easily relate to what is shown on online web shows and other video content. As a result, it develops a lot of behavioral changes in youth today. It not only makes them aggressive in both their behaviour and in their thoughts, but it is also likely to influence them with what they have seen regularly like smoking, drinking, drugs, nudity and vulgarity, which are shown frequently in these online web shows. This further develops several unhealthy habits at an early age. Here are some of the points, which we should think properly-

1. An average Indian youth spends approximately eight hours 29 minutes watching online video content, which is far more than the global trend of six hours and 45 minutes.
2. The relationship between watching violent web series and an increase in aggression and violent behaviour in the youth.
3. Increase in number of insomnia, depression, obesity and eyes disorder cases amongst the youth.
4. Deleterious effect on academic performance due to binge watching.
5. Nudity and Obscenity encourages irresponsible sexual behaviour, and the web shows rarely mention anything about sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy.
6. Alcohol, Smoking, Tobacco, Drugs and Weed are advertised directly on online web series, which rarely mention their adverse effects.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out the psychological effects of online web series and video content in youth.
2. To find behavioural changes because of the nature of content shown in web series.
3. To find impact on academic performance and physical activities in the youth due to binge watching.
4. To explore the perception of youth regarding nature of online video content and web series in India.

Research Methodology

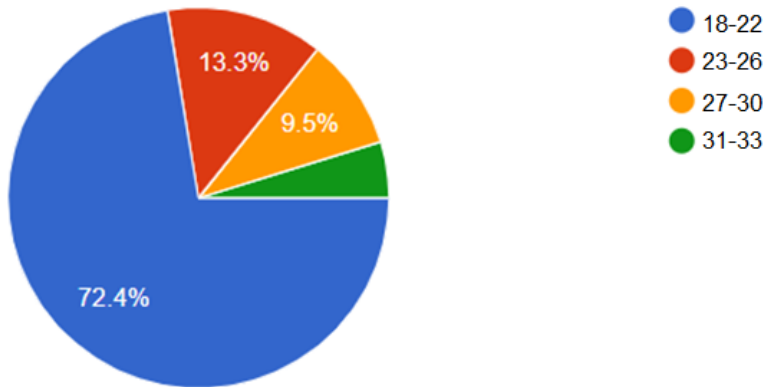
In order to get the utmost from this research study, the researcher has used the quantitative method to conduct this study. This particular study is designed as exploratory research, where it aims to study the various effects of web series and online streaming content on the Indian youth.

The purposive random sampling was done on undergraduate and postgraduate students, and young professionals working in Patna, which is a capital city of Bihar, where a total of 195 responses were received and studied by the researcher. A questionnaire with close-ended questions was built on Google Forms, and was sent to the respondents through Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and email.

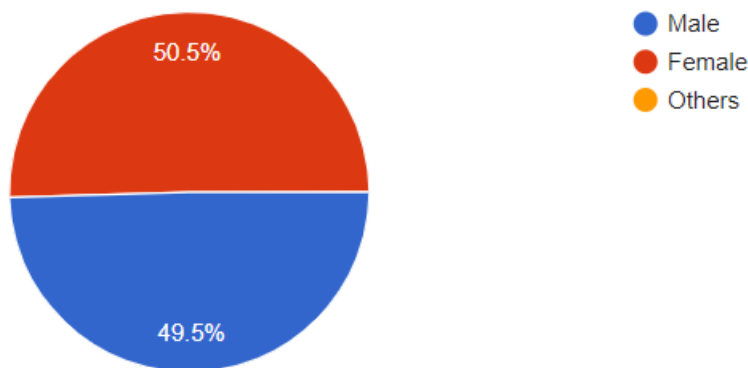
Results

Data Analysis & Interpretation

The research data collected was analysed on the basis of descriptive research methodology. The data collected is the quantitative data.

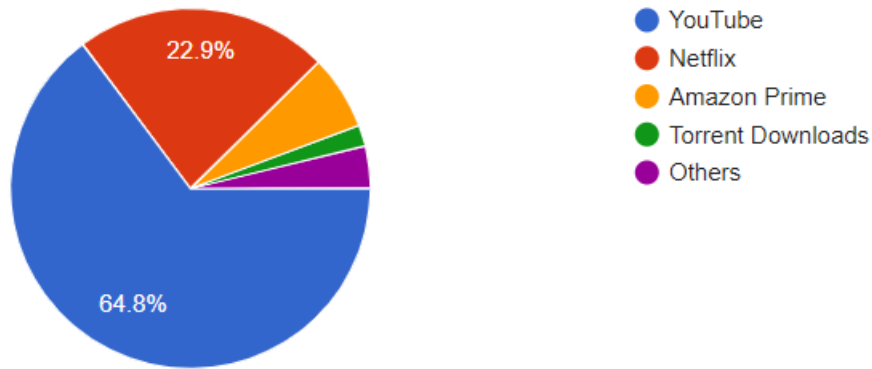
Respondent analysis:Age:

This study is based on the responses received by the youth, where it can be clearly seen that majority of the respondents, which is 72.4% are between 18 to 22 years of age. Whereas, 13.3% of respondents are between 23-26 years, 9.5% of respondents are between 27-30 years and only 4.8% of respondents are between 31-33 years of age.

Gender:

When categorizing the respondents on the gender basis, it can be seen that 50.5% of the respondents were female, while 49.5% of respondents are male. This clearly shows that females are equally interested towards online streaming and binge watching as males.

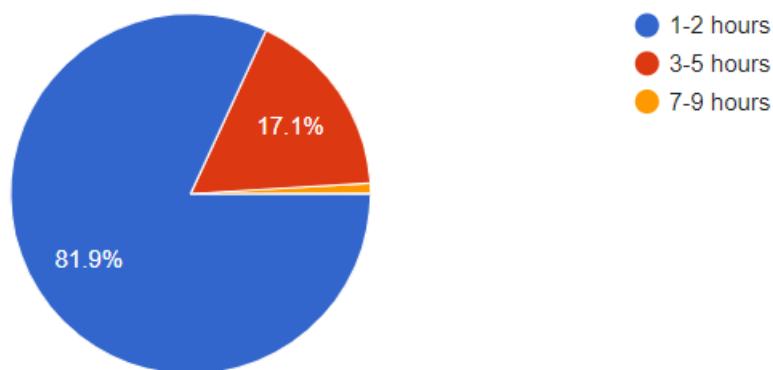
Q.1. Which is your favourite online platform for streaming video content?



Interpretation:

Currently, there are several OTT platforms that offer online video streaming. In the above question, the respondents were asked about their favourite online platform for streaming video content, where 64.8% chose YouTube as their favourite online platform. 22.9% of respondents chose Netflix, while 6.7% chose Amazon Prime, 1.9% agreed to use Torrent and 3.8% of them chose others as their answer. This clearly states that the majority is interested in free video streaming on YouTube, rather than paying subscription fee for other OTT platforms.

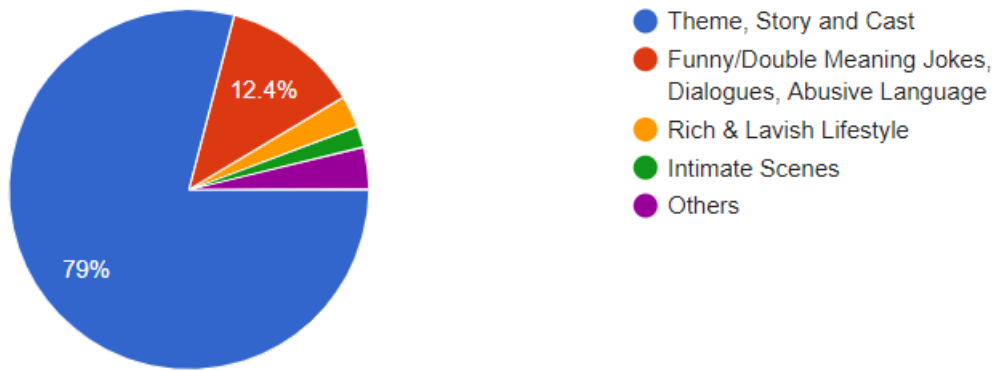
Q.2. How much time you generally spend on watching web series or other video content online every day?



Interpretation:

When asked about the average time spent on watching web series or other video content online on a daily basis, 81.9% agreed to spend 1 to 2 hours every day, while 17.1% agreed to spend 3 to 5 hours every day watching online content. Only 1% respondent agreed to be spending 7 to 9 hours every day on online video streaming.

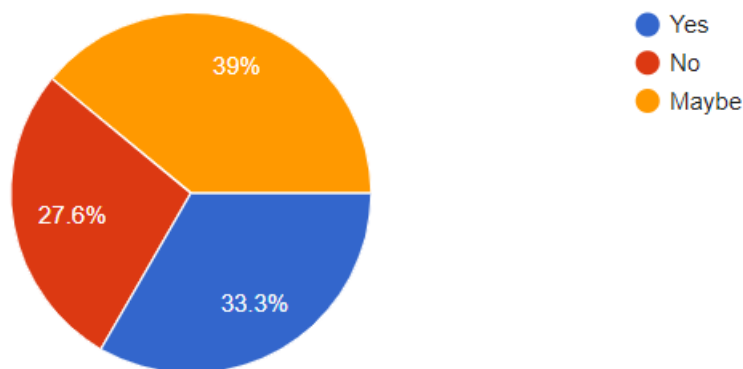
Q.3 What is the most attractive element about web series?



Interpretation:

When asked about the most attractive element about the web series, 79% of the respondents agreed to like the overall theme, story and cast of the web series, while 12.4% agreed to like funny/double meaning jokes, dialogue delivery and abusive language. It is also very interesting to know that only 2.9% and 1.9% of respondents liked rich & lavish lifestyle and intimate scenes. However, 3.8% of the respondents liked other elements about the web series.

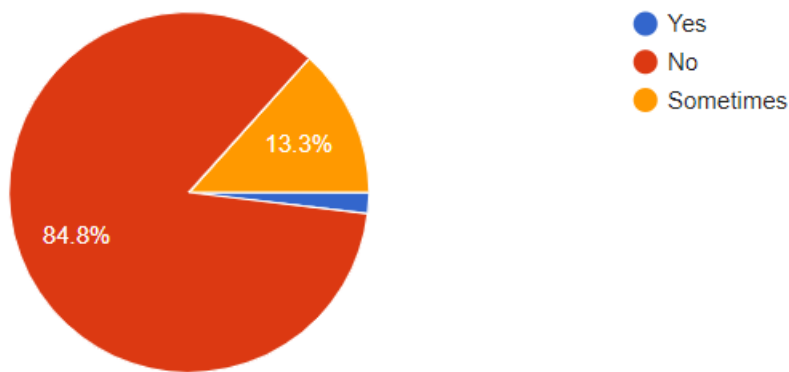
Q. 4. Do you agree that web series and online content have psychological effects on you?



Interpretation:

When directly asked whether the web series and online content have psychological effects on the youth, 33.3%, of respondents said yes, it has an impact on them. While, 27.6% said that it never had a psychological impact on them. It is also important to know that 39% of all respondents aren't sure that whether web series and online content have psychological effect on them or not.

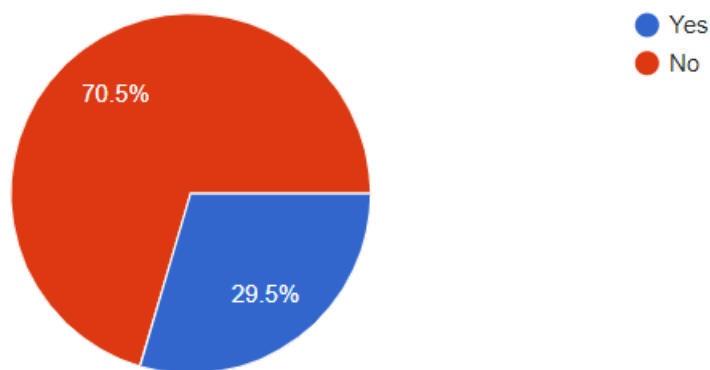
Q.5. Do you feel attracted towards alcohol, smoking or drugs after watching them on web series and other online content?



Interpretation:

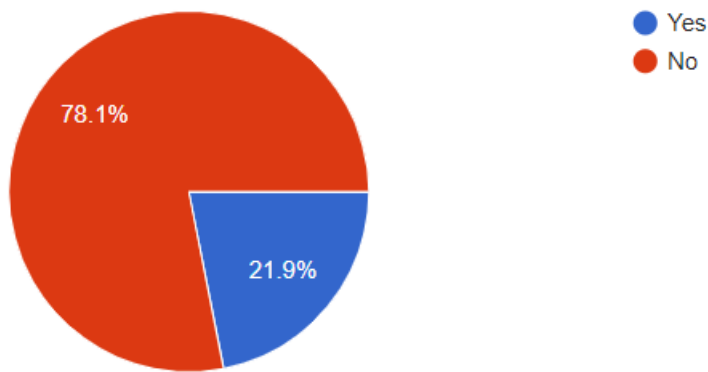
When it was asked whether the respondents are attracted towards alcohol, smoking or drugs after watching them on web series and other online content, only 2% respondents said yes, while the majority 84.8% said no. However, 13.3% of the respondents also agreed that sometimes they are fascinated towards alcohol, smoking and drugs after seeing them on web series or other online content.

Q.6. Have you ever watched any web series or online content just because of sex scenes, intimacy or abusive language used in the content?

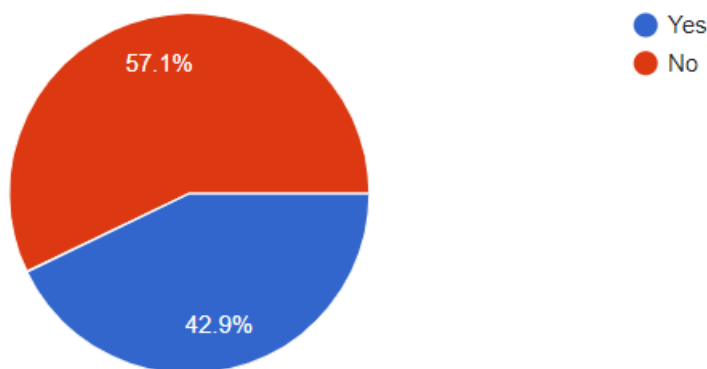


Interpretation:

In order to study the various impacts of web series and online streaming content on the Indian youth, it is important to know whether the youth has ever watched any web series or online content just because of sex scenes, intimacy or abusive language used in the content. When asked the question about the same, 29.5% agreed to have watched any specific web series for the sex, intimacy and abusive content. However, 70.5% agreed to have never watched any specific web series for the same reason.

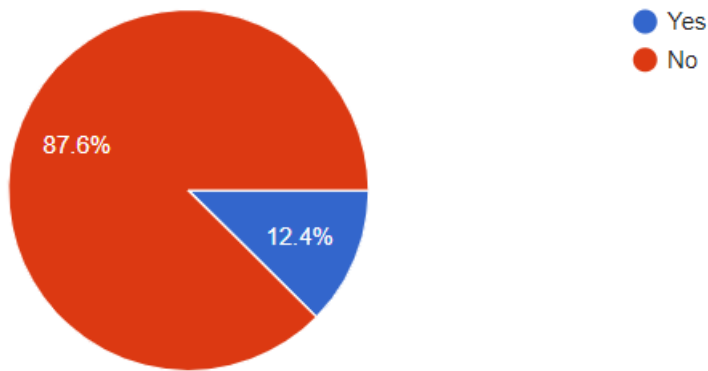
Q.7. Do you think web series or online content have caused insecurity in your real life?**Interpretation:**

Another important question asked was whether the web series of online streaming content have caused insecurity? The 78.1% of respondents opted for No, while it must be noted that 21.9% of the respondents have agreed that web series and video streaming content have caused them insecurity.

Q.8. Has binge watching ever affected your performance in exams or other important works?**Interpretation:**

The next question was to assess whether OTT content have affected the academic performance of the youth. Here, 42.9% of the respondents have agreed to the facts that binge watching online video streaming and web series have affected their performance in exams or other important works. However, 57.1% disagreed to the impact of online video streaming in their academic performances.

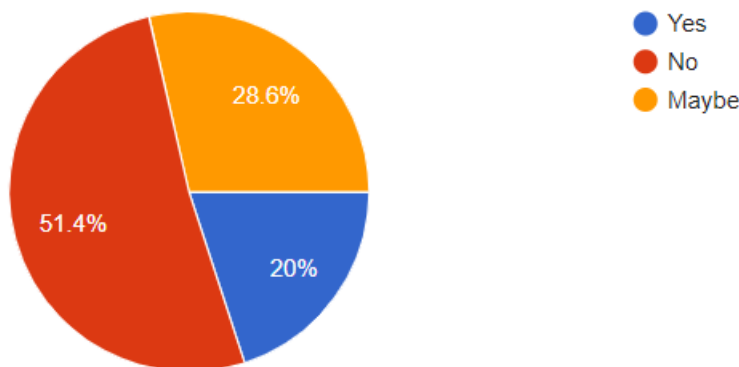
Q.9. Do you think web shows like Mirzapur and Sacred Games have risen aggression and anger in you?



Interpretation:

The next question was around two very popular web series – Mirzapur and Sacred Games. The question aimed to understand whether these web series and the content have caused a rise in aggression and anger amongst the respondents, where 87.6% refused while 12.4% have answered the question in yes, agreeing to witness a rise in their aggression and anger.

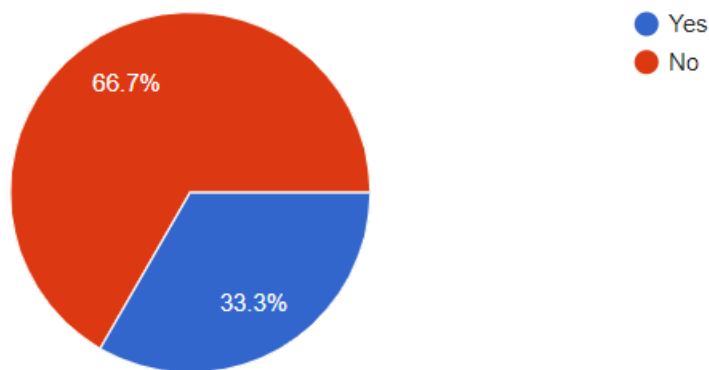
Q.10. Have web series and online shows affected your spoken language?



Interpretation:

When asked whether the web series and other online video content have affected their spoken language, 20% of the respondents agreed, while 51.4% of the respondents opted for a No. It also must be noted that 28.6% of the respondents weren't sure whether they find changes in their spoken language after binge watching a web series or online video content.

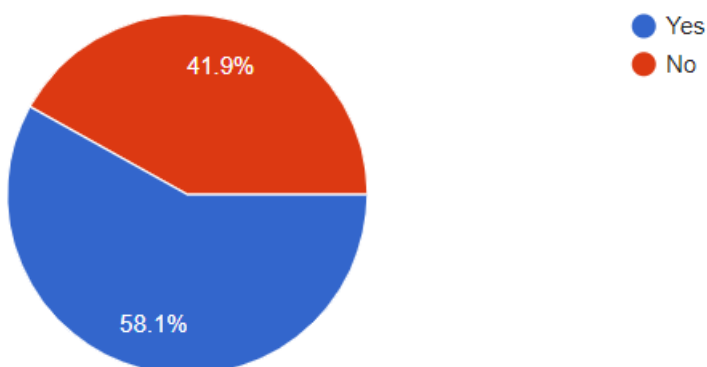
Q.11. Do you avoid physical activities, outdoor games or outings due to binge watching web series and online shows?



Interpretation:

The next question was a quest to find whether the respondents between 18-33 years of young age also avoid physical activities, outdoor games or outings due to web series and online shows. Here, one-third (33.3%) of respondents agreed that they avoid physical activities and outdoor games, which can strengthen their immunity and health. However, 66.7% of the respondents claimed to give preference to physical activities and outdoor games over binge watching.

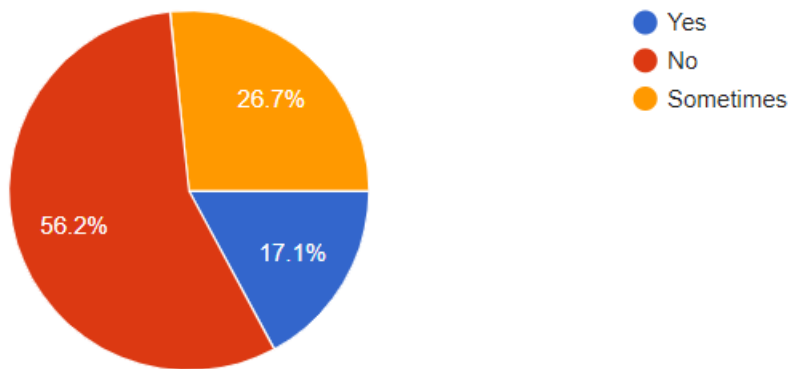
Q.12. Do you think binge watching web series and online video content is causing insomnia or depression?



Interpretation:

The next question was to analyse whether binge watching is causing a rise in insomnia or depression amongst the youth. When asked whether binge watching web series and online video content is causing insomnia or depression, the majority – 58.1% of the respondents agreed with answering a Yes. While 41.9% of the respondents disagreed that binge watching has ever caused insomnia or depression in them.

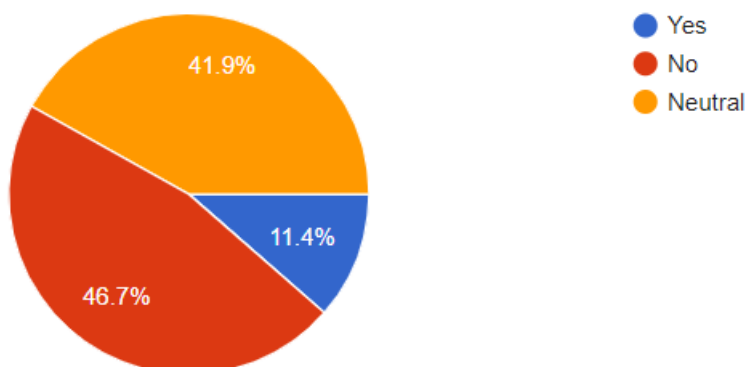
Q.13. Do you sometimes avoid your friends and family too?



Interpretation:

The next question was to assess whether the respondents avoid spending time with their friends and family too for binge watching any particular web series or online streaming content. Here, 17.1% agreed of all respondents agreed, while 26.7% claimed that sometimes they give preference to binge watching over friends and family. However, 56.2% clearly mentioned that they never avoid their friends and family for binge watching.

Q.14. Do you feel the culture shown (sex, violence, alcohol and drugs) fit for consumption of Indian Youth?



Interpretation:

When asked whether the respondents feel that the culture shown (sex, violence, alcohol and drugs) in web series and online videos fit for the consumption of Indian Youth, 46.7% of the respondents answered that they don't find it fit for consumption, while 41.9% of them were neutral. Only 11.4% of all respondents were convinced that the content shown is fit for consumption.

Findings

1. The study found that YouTube is the most popular online video streaming platform amongst the respondents, followed by Netflix, Amazon Prime and others.
2. The respondents agreed that web series and online video content have direct or indirect psychological impact on them and they also feel insecurities in their life as well.
3. The respondents agreed to have watched any specific web series or online content for content just because of sex scenes, intimacy or abusive language used in the content, where close to half of them were somewhat agreed that they found its effect on their spoken language.
4. The majority of the respondents agreed that binge watching has given a rise to insomnia and depression amongst them, and a good percentage also agreed that watching web series and online video content have affected their academic performance as well.
5. When it comes to physical activities, exercise, yoga and spending time with friends and family, a large number of the respondents have agreed that they compromise everything just for the sake of binge watching any specific web series or online video. This tells us that they overlook the importance of their physical health and social relations as well.
6. The respondents feel that the culture shown (sex, violence, alcohol and drugs) in web series and online videos is somewhat unfit for the consumption of Indian youth. Here, 46.7% of the respondents answered that they don't find it fit for consumption, while 41.9% of them were neutral.

Conclusion

After analysing several aspects, it can be clearly stated that web series and online streaming content have a huge impact on the Indian youth. The content being produced and showcased on the online platforms have been successful in grabbing youth's attention, and moving them away from the traditional television soap operas.

The content showcased on OTT platforms filled with sexual, abusive and violent content together with alcohol and drugs have caused psychological effects on the Indian youth, where they have agreed to suffer from insomnia, depression and insecurities in their life. The youth is also witnessing academic loss and are also getting prone to health issues. On the other side, the preference to binge watching is also affecting their relations with friends and family.

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